



HISTORY OF THE EIGHTY-FIRST ILLINOIS INFANTRY VOLUNTEERS

"In the summer of 1862, President LINCOLN issued the second call for volunteers to serve the United States for three years, in order to help to put down the Great Rebellion of the slave states." (1) Regiments were organized in Union County, Illinois, two at Jonesboro and one at Anna. The recruits were mainly from Perry, Franklin, Williamson, Jackson, Union, Pulaski and Alexander Counties. James P. COWAN organized a full company from DuQuoin. They were designated Co. "A" since they were the first to arrive; COWAN was elected their captain. Company "B", the second full company, was enrolled on 4 August 1862; Thomas HIGHTOWER of Jackson County was chosen their captain. John C. ARMSTRONG was elected captain of Company "C"; Cornelius S. WARD of Co. "D"; Marmaduke F. SMITH was elected captain of Co. "E"; Samuel L. CAMPBELL of Co. "F"; George W. SISNEY of Co. "G"; Alfred F. CRANE of Co. "H"; John W. FELT of Co. "I"; and Samuel PYLE of Co. "K".

By 15 August 1862, the full number of companies had arrived at Anna and the Eighty-First Illinois Regiment was organized. They were mustered into service on 26 August 1862 with the following field and staff officers: James J. DOLLINS of Benton, Franklin Co., as Colonel; Franklin CAMPBELL of DuQuoin, Perry Co., as Lieutenant Colonel; Andrew W. ROGERS of Carbondale, Jackson Co., as Major; Zebedee HAMMOCK of Pinckneyville, Perry Co., as Adjutant; Logan H. ROOTS of Tamaroa, Perry Co., as Quartermaster; Lewis DYER of DuQuoin, Perry Co., as Surgeon; Isaac M. NEELY as First Assistant Surgeon; Abel CAMPBELL of Perry Co. as Second Assistant Surgeon; and William S. POST of Carbondale, Jackson Co., as Chaplain.

On 6 September the Regiment boarded a train of box cars to leave for Cairo. They did not leave for "Dixie" until the 8th of October, when they joined General GRANT in Tennessee. The Regiment began their duty at Humboldt, TN. They moved with the army from Lagrange, TN, to Abbeyville, MS, in December 1862 then retreated to Memphis on 19 January 1863, where the campaign against Vicksburg began on 20 February 1863. The 81st arrived at Lake Providence, LA, seventy-five miles above Vicksburg, on 23 February 1863 where they remained until 17 April when the command moved to Milliken's Bend, twenty-eight miles above Vicksburg. Volunteers were selected on 21 April to travel between Vicksburg and Grand Gulf Batteries with seven common transports loaded with supplies for the Army. Captain George W. SISNEY and Private George W. WINFIELD from Company G were accepted. On 1 May the Regiment crossed the Mississippi River at Bruinsburg, below Grand Gulf, and marched 20 miles to Port Gibson by 2 P.M. where they took part in that battle under the command of Major General John A. LOGAN and Major General James B. McPHERSON. The 81st Regiment fought in this battle of Thompson's Hill in a cane-brake until dusk and lost only two men, from Company D.

During the early part of May the Regiment participated in the battle of Raymond on the 12th, the capture of Jackson, the State Capital, on the 14th, Champion Hill on the 16th, then on the 17th at Black River Bridge. At 9 A.M. on 19 May the Siege of Vicksburg was begun and continued until the 22nd when they retreated. The loss to the 81st Illinois was 96 wounded and 11 killed, including Colonel J.J. DOLLINS, Lt. William L. FARMER, Sgt. Milton S. RUSSELL, and several enlisted men of Company G. Companies B and F did not lose any men. During the siege Lt. Colonel CAMPBELL was promoted to Colonel and Major ROGERS to Lt. Colonel. The Regiment continued its siege duties until 4 July 1863, when the Third Division was given the duty of occupying and garrisoning the city.

The 81st Illinois Infantry continued to take part in many of the battles during the remainder of the Civil War. They were ordered to Mobile, AL, where they fought from 27 March 1865 until the close of the siege on 8 April. The Regiment captured 83 prisoners and had only 14 wounded and 6 killed. Then they were ordered to Montgomery, AL, where the Third Brigade (the 124th, the 108th, and 81st of Illinois and the 8th of Iowa) were

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given the honored position of army post duty, where they remained until ordered home by way of Meridian and Vicksburg, MS. They left Vicksburg on 31 July 1865 and went directly to Chicago for final payment and to be mustered out on 5 Aug 1865.

"There were mustered into the Eighty-first, enlisted men, a total of 1,144; of that number there were 54 killed or died of wounds received in battle, 287 died of disease, 274 resigned or were discharged, and 529 mustered out of service."(2)

(1)Experience in The War of The Great Rebellion, By a Soldier of the Eighty-first Regiment Illinois Volunteer Infantry, Second Edition, Revised, by Edmund NEWSOME, 1880, reprint 1984, Jackson County, IL, Historical Society, page 1.

(2)The Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois, Volume V, revised by Brigadier General J.N. REECE, Adjutant General, 1901, Phillips Bros., State Printers, Springfield, IL, page 99.

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